



As I stood there in the drizzle  
Steve Vinton, March 29, 2008

Emmanueli phoned for help around 10pm. Our huge dump truck Mwanaume was loaded with 200 bags of cement, ten tons, enough to enable us to finish the girls dorm and to get the foundations in for the first lecture halls at our college and maybe the library and computer lab as well. Emmanueli was coming up the huge Itulavanu hill about two hours from Madisi when Mwanaume's gears failed. Emmanueli, thankfully one of the most cautious and careful men I know, had just started crawling up the hill and so he said it wasn't hard at all to bring the truck to a safe stop when it started rolling back down. It's the height of the rainy season right now, and we haven't hardly gone a night without rain, which meant that we knew that the odds that all of that cement would still be dry and useable by morning was decidedly poor. So Fenet and Jovinus took the huge tarp off of Chapakazi (our other big truck) and set off for Itulavanu. Fenet and Jovinus didn't just bring the tarp though like Emmanueli asked them to do. Even though it was after midnight by the time they had delivered the tarp, they decided to head on into town and got out of bed a mechanic friend of Fenet's, drove him back to Itulavanu, got Mwanaume's gears fixed in the middle of the night, and then Emmanueli, Fenet and Jovinus all returned very early in the morning. Just after six. And just as a light drizzle was beginning to fall. The tarp would prevent a complete disaster but we all knew that as the water dripped into the bed of the truck it was almost certain that the loss would stretch into the hundreds of dollars, perhaps more than a thousand.

And then as I stood there in the drizzle, my eyes watched a wonderful thing happen.

Our students, who were showing up early to take their quarterly exams, were quickly

organized by Festo into a wonderful team and they loaded each precious bag of cement off the truck and into the dry storeroom. All 200 bags. I stood there and watched them quickly take off their ties and their nicely pressed white shirts. Twelve students climbed up on top of the truck, those who were really tall reached up to grab the 50 kilo bags from the guys on top of the truck, and then they lowered them onto the backs of other students, who hauled them off. It went on and on, bag after bag, as the drizzle mercifully diminished to a mist. I watched it all with a sense of marvel at what these students had become in such a short time. They didn't need to be ordered to help, they didn't need to be yelled at, and they definitely didn't need any supervision. Jovinus stood up there in front of them and told them what he and Fenet had done in the middle of the night to try to save all of that cement, and then he told everyone that as soon as they got back to Madisi at 6am, Fenet ran in, took a quick bath, and then got behind the wheel to drive our big bus Huruma to the Lugoda Hospital! It didn't matter what had happened in the middle of the night, Fenet wasn't going to let down all of those sick people who were depending on him! And those words were enough to energize the whole group.

There was Levocatus, strong, incredibly strong, but so passive, so frustratingly passive, so *annoyingly* passive, the kid who never put his heart into anything, here today I saw him shine as he threw his whole self into the task. The breakthrough in his life that I had been hoping for! I couldn't help noticing that Mseven had morphed into the leader I thought I detected in him a long time ago. That was priceless, for a ton of reasons, Conrad was not only working, he was smiling, and more than that he was smiling at me, indeed he was smiling *with* me.

When it was all finished, I couldn't stop smiling, they couldn't stop smiling, they knew that we had done a great thing.

And it was time for us to talk. There were things that I wanted them to know and understand. The exams for the day could wait a little bit longer. How much does a bag of cement cost? 14,000/=. They all knew the price. No one hesitated. But we got ours for our college for 12,500/=. They were shocked. And I wanted them to be shocked. I wanted them to know that Godfrey saves every single shilling he can by asking for discounts, by begging sometimes for discounts, by insisting on discounts. And even at the discounted price, where did all that money come from for those two hundred bags of cement. They could do the math. We were talking about millions of shillings after all. I wanted them to know that while there were every now and then a few wealthy people who wanted to help us who sent sometimes a thousand dollars (a million shillings!), most of the money came from people who sent fifty or a hundred dollars, and lumped all together it meant that we were able to buy the cement. So some one gave of themselves to buy the cement, Godfrey fought to save money by getting a good price, Emmanueli worked late into the night to haul it and when something went wrong, to avert disaster and all that money getting wasted, Jovinus and Fenet – and all of them as our students – were ready to throw ourselves into special effort – and that's how our college will be built. I thought again of how daring – and how exciting it was, and is, that Paul dared to call us “co-laborers together with God” – all united, all doing different things, but all working towards the incredible goal that God Himself has set before us.

And it is how our college will be built. I want them to know that. It's also how more and more of these secondary schools are going to be built too. I'm enjoying immensely teaching

these kids pre-calculus, but in truth probably not even one percent of them will ever use this math that I'm teaching them. How many people on the planet after all really use pre-calculus once they finish school? But they're not just learning math at this school. They're learning something infinitely more valuable here. And I got a glimpse of it this morning.

What a wonderful final act to the grand theater before Susan and I leave with Joshua and Jonathan for America. Susan has had her grand send-off as so many of her friends from the villages around here have come to say good-bye. Veronica and Harima made wonderful food for us and Godfrey and Emmanueli, and Susan and Joshua and Jonathan and I had a wonderful farewell dinner. Veronica and Harima had each chosen one of their huge chickens, and Festo killed one of his pigs and sent us fresh pork to eat. No question that it was a wonderful send-off. But for me the best send-off possible was getting to see another example of the kind of people my students are fast becoming. I know that it's going to be impossible in my lifetime to build enough schools to ensure that every kid in this country at the very least gets a chance to go to school. It's impossible. Totally impossible. But as I watched those kids work this morning, I indulged myself for a few moments in imagining what it will be like in a few years when these students graduate and we can send dozens of them out to villages all over this country to start new schools. For just a few moments, as I watched them work so incredibly hard, spurred on only by some kind of determination deep inside of them, I allowed myself to fantasize that that which is impossible just might actually happen after all.

In just a few hours we'll be leaving for Iringa to board the bus to go down to Dar and then early Sunday morning we'll board our flight to America. What I know though is that I want to hurry back here.